

First Trinity Lutheran Church
July 8, 2012
Mark 6:1-13

Keep Making Pancakes

Soon, within two weeks or so we will be watching the summer Olympics from London. With the heat we have been experiencing it is almost hot to work outside so watching the Olympics is a fun thing to do during these days. As the Olympics approach I was thinking that we all like winners. Our culture, our country, our society are caught up with the idea of winning. Winning, succeeding, getting ahead, overcoming great obstacles these are the ideals, these are the goals that society places on all people. We can see this as evidence by our preoccupation with sports. We like to see our USA team win. We like to follow a winner. Another example that people like winners is the Washington Nationals. They are playing great this year and attendance is much higher this year than in years past. Why, people like winners!

Our like of winners is not only evident in sports, but throughout all of life, we like to see and know about people who have succeeded. We like to read, or watch stories on TV of people who have overcome great mental or physical obstacles, and make a success of their lives. Some years ago a story appeared in a mid-west newspaper about a high school basketball player who hurt himself while weight lifting, and how he had broken and strained something in his back to a point where the doctors didn't know if he would walk again. But the feeling in his legs returned, and the boy returned to the gym relearning to learn to run and shoot baskets again. The article talked about his winning attitude, about the way he has overcome his accident, how he was making himself a winner again.

I wonder if they would have printed the article, if this boy had remained paralyzed

from the neck down and then had to live the daily unglamorous struggle of having someone feed him, dress him, and help him in the bathroom. I wonder if they would have printed this article showing the frustration, the hurt, the helplessness that someone who is paralyzed feels. Most often we want to hear about winners and not about those who know the pain of isolation and the hurt of rejection. We don't hear much about those who are struggling daily with the brokenness of life? There are many people who live lives of quiet brokenness and frustration, feeling the strong cultural preoccupation with winning, getting ahead and knowing they have given their all, they have tried, but cannot break out of their individual brokenness and have to live day in and day out with the consequences of this struggle.

Today given the readings appointed for this day we Christians find ourselves living in a paradox. The paradox is that those who are weak in the eyes of society are strong in God's eyes.

A statement from 2 Corinthians is a paradox, it says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." How can a person have power when he or she is weak? According to our human standards, this is a paradox. Looking at the scripture readings this morning, we see an element of truth to this statement about power in weakness.

A Good example of this paradox is Ezekiel. Ezekiel was called by God to be a prophet, to a people who God said had rebelled against him. Ezekiel despite his human weakness was given power by God to be a prophet to the rebellious nation of Israel, a people who had turned away from God.

In Ezekiel's weakness God's power became perfect. Out of the weakness of this human being, God gave him strength to speak to a nation, to speak about the love of God for his chosen people. But even after his call, the results of this prophet's work were not going to be successful. God told Ezekiel that the people may even refuse to listen to him, but God would be with him even in this weakness because God wanted the people to know a prophet would be among them. In weakness, Ezekiel brought the word of God to the nation of Israel even though they did not want to listen. Ezekiel lived a paradox. He was weak but God made him strong.

There is a paradox between the demands of our world, and the demands of our God. Our world calls us to be strong, to succeed, to be upwardly mobile, but our God calls us to surrender, to be dependent on him, to worry about our neighbor, to treat others with kindness, humility and honesty.

Even Jesus was a paradox to the people in his time. His life style, his birth, his death was a paradoxical statement of how God's power would be manifested on this earth. Jesus himself appeared weak to many of his contemporaries. They were expecting a kind of Superman. They anticipated spectacular signs and unmistakable evidence of his divinity. They saw only a carpenter's son, a local boy, a prophet without honor. The people of Jesus hometown said this of Him. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

Jesus didn't fit the image people had of the Messiah. They expected a mighty king. A man who would lead a mighty army, a man who would make this small nation of Israel strong and powerful. A leader who would defeat the Romans. But they got a babe

born in a stable, a carpenter's son who for approximately 30 years didn't even make a stir among the people. When Jesus did finally go about his ministry, he walked, he lived with outcasts, he ate with sinners, he made enemies of the priests and the rulers.

Jesus died because he didn't fit the expectation and did not have the value system the people of Israel expected. Jesus came as a servant to people. He came to show that God didn't want people of superhuman ability, but he wanted people who would believe in God's power for their lives. He showed that God wanted people who would live in this paradox. He showed that when you are weak, believing in God and not self, then you are really strong.

Now Paul writes to the people in the Corinthian Church "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." If we are true to ourselves, we must admit that we do live by the paradox. God's grace is sufficient for us, period. When we have sinned, when we grieve, when we are tossed about by the circumstance of life, God's grace is sufficient for us. In our weakness moments, God's grace is sufficient for us.

Six -year-old Brandon decided one Saturday morning to make his parents pancakes for breakfast. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor. He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor which by now had a few tracks left by his dog. Brandon was covered with flour and getting frustrated He wanted this to be something very good for Mom and Dad, but it was going very bad. He didn't know what to do next, whether to put it all into the oven or on the stove and he didn't know how the

stove worked! Suddenly he saw the dog licking from the bowl of mix and reached to push it away when he knocked the carton of eggs to the floor. Frantically he tried to clean up this monumental mess but slipped on the eggs, getting his pajamas white and yellow with the sticky mess on the floor. And just then he saw Dad standing at the door big tears welled up in Brandon's eyes. All he'd wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He was sure a scolding was coming, maybe even a spanking. But his father just watched him. Then, walking through the mess, he picked up his crying son, hugged him and loved him, getting his own pajamas white and sticky in the process!

That's how God deals with us. We try to do something good in life, but it turns into a mess. Our marriage gets all sticky or we insult a friend, or we can't stand our job, or our health goes bad. Sometimes we just stand there in tears because we can't think of anything else to do. That's when God picks us up and loves us and forgives us, even though some of our mess gets all over Him.

But just because we might mess up, we can't stop trying to "make pancakes" for God or for others. Sooner or later we'll get it right, but it doesn't really matter because the most important thing is that we just keep on trying. "God's grace is sufficient for us, for His power is made perfect in weakness."

Amen